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ABSTRACT

A study is proposed to attempt to answer the following: (1) How many and what kinds of Community College students drop out or do not return? (2) In what ways do non-persisters differ from persisters and what can colleges do to increase retention? (3) What is the employment experience of non-persisters who did not complete occupational programs or transfer programs? (4) How successful are "stopouts" who reenter postsecondary education and how do their new objectives differ from their old ones? (5) Which continuing education programs do former students need and what kinds of approaches might be best? (6) What are the characteristics of enrollees in non-credit courses and how many reenroll in successive terms? The basic sample will consist of 30,000 new students enrolling in 1/3 of the California community colleges for the first time in the fall term of 1972. This sample will be used to establish persistence, transfer, reentry, and graduation rates over time. Sub-samples will be drawn for intensive transcript analysis and followup of transfers, non-persisters and stopouts through interviews and questionnaires. Administrators, faculty and counselors will also be interviewed. The time span currently projected runs to the beginning of the fall 1975 term. (KM)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT FLOW: A STUDY OF THE ORIGINS AND PERSISTENCE OF STUDENTS IN TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Background

Various reports made to the Coordinating Council over a period of years have called attention to the need for broad scale studies of undergraduate students and the programs they pursue. In November 1970, Coordinating Council members were asked to recommend priorities for study by staff among a series of higher educational issues related to Council concerns. Among the 15 issues suggested, two which were given highest priority by the members are problems of student persistence and access to higher education.[1]

Council members have not been alone in asking for more information about undergraduate students and programs. The Legislative Analyst, the Department of Finance, and the Joint Committee for the Master Plan for Higher Education have all in turn sought information about the extent to which the Community Colleges are fulfilling their basic functions as indicated by student performance and persistence.

Certain of the federal Higher Education Act amendments of 1972 are concerned with state level planning for increasing access to postsecondary education by state agencies with broad responsibilities for the coordination of higher education. The new provisions assume the existence of a student data base which is not yet available in California. It is hoped that the proposed study of student flow and persistence will constitute a significant step forward in establishing such a data base, particularly for students who are not in pursuit of baccalaureate degrees.

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The California Community Colleges are enrolling an ever increasing proportion of the young people who would have attended the University of California or the California State University and Colleges in former years. At the same time they are attracting vast numbers of students whose family backgrounds do not include a tradition of college attendance. While the Community Colleges have assumed the major responsibility for providing access to postsecondary education for a majority of Californians, no major studies have yet been undertaken of student persistence and flow into and through these institutions on a statewide basis. From time to time non-educational agencies and organizations have undertaken studies of Community College students, the most recent example being a study of articulation being conducted by the Department of Finance. More frequently it has been the Coordinating Council staff which has performed studies of undergraduate students in California higher education.

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1. January 4-5, 1971, agenda for the Coordinating Council for Higher Education, "Higher Educational Issues Deserving Council Attention During the 1970's."

The current study by Coordinating Council staff will address itself to the two priorities established nearly two years ago by Council members, i.e., persistence and access, while treating the broader problems of student origins and flow in relation to individual and institutional characteristics.

What Do We Know Now?

California Community College student follow-up studies to date have been primarily concerned with the success of transfer students in the University of California and the California State University and Colleges. The evidence of success of these students after transfer is consistently positive when earned grade-point averages and attainment of baccalaureate degrees are examined. Both the University of California and the California State University and Colleges have conducted state-wide studies of Community College student performance after transfer which affirm the achievement of these students in upper division programs. However, little is now known about Community College students who have indicated their intent to work toward a baccalaureate degree (or higher) when they enter college but who do not transfer into upper division programs.

Approximately two-thirds of the new Community College students express an intention to earn a baccalaureate degree but far fewer than one-third do in fact transfer.

In 1969 a group of predominantly Northern California Community Colleges banded together to conduct cooperatively a study of attrition among their students. Attention was focused on students who dropped out with no credit earned, before the end of the first semester, who constitute a small proportion of the non-persisters. An attempt was also made to query students who dropped out at later times by mailed questionnaires. However, the studies did not reveal rates of persistence nor did they compare the characteristics and performance of the dropouts with those of the persisters.

Certain national information is available for public Community Colleges, which can be compared with California data.

1. Nationally in 1970, there were 2.5 times as many freshmen as sophomores in Community Colleges, while in California the number of freshmen was 2.9 times the number of sophomores. In both California and nationally, the number of associate degrees awarded was substantially less than the sophomore enrollments.[1]

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1. 1972 Junior College Directory, Washington, D.C.: The American Association of Junior Colleges, 1972. (Table III, page 91). Also mimeographed reports of the Financial Services Section of the Chancellor's Office for the California Community Colleges.

2. Also in 1970, there were slightly more full-time students than part-time students nationally (1.116 vs. 1.079 million), while in California the part-time enrollment was 1.6 times the full-time enrollment, when adults in non-credit programs are included.[1]

3. Student mobility is high and increasing. Progression from high school to college to the associate or baccalaureate degree in uninterrupted attendance is becoming less the model than the exception.

For the California Community Colleges, some additional "knowns" can be derived from enrollment, transfer, and degree and certificate data. The most recent data which are available by occupational field and discipline area are for 1968-69.[2] Total enrollment that year was 665 thousand, of which 85 per cent was in graded classes. In that same year the Community Colleges awarded 44 thousand associate degrees, of which almost 50 per cent were in occupational programs. Three thousand certificates for programs based on one year of occupational education were also awarded. The following year the number of upper division students who transferred to the State Colleges from Community Colleges was about 22 thousand, of whom about 42 per cent had earned an associate degree before transfer. Thus, the ratio of associate degrees and certificates to total graded enrollment in 1968-69 was about 78 awards per 1,000 students in degree-credit courses. When students who transferred to the State Colleges without first obtaining a degree are added to the ratio, we find that 100 students per thousand enrollment can be accounted for in terms of degrees earned and/or transfer. As Community College enrollments approach the one million figure in the mid-1970's, we will be confronted with at least three-quarter million students enrolled who will not receive degrees or certificates, or transfer to senior institutions.

What Do We Need To Know?

The major questions which the proposed study will attempt to answer are the following:

1. How many and what kinds of Community College students (a) do not persist to the end of each successive term after initial registration, and (b) do not return after completing a particular term?

2. In what ways do the non-persisters differ from their classmates who enroll in continuous attendance to the associate degree and/or transfer? What can the colleges do to increase retention of more students to the degree or transfer, by making changes in policies, programs, and student services?

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1. Op. cit., page 2

2. Sources are reports of the Financial Services Section of the Chancellor's Office for the California Community Colleges, for enrollment data; U.S.O.E. report 54045-69, Associate Degrees and Other Formal Awards Below the Baccalaureate, 1968-69, for degrees and certificates; and Technical Memo #4 of the Chancellor's Office for the California State University and Colleges, Summary "Profile" of Upper Division Transfer Students from the California Community Colleges, April 1971, for transfer data.

3. What is the employment experience of Community College students who do not complete a prescribed curriculum in (a) an occupational field or (2) a transfer program? Are students who have undertaken occupational education programs more successful in obtaining employment than students who have had only general education before seeking regular employment?

4. What is the degree of success of "stopouts" who reenter postsecondary education within a few years of leaving the Community College? How do their new objectives differ from their initial intentions, e.g., occupational vs. transfer goals?

5. What are the needs of former Community College students for continuing education for career and/or personal development? What kinds of new approaches might meet these varying needs?

6. What are the characteristics of enrollees in non-credit classes? How many have educational needs which lead to their reenrollment in successive terms, once their initial course is completed?

Why Do We Need to Know?

Since only a minority of the Community College students--about ten per cent--can be accounted for in terms of (1) known transfer to a four-year institution and (2) completion of an associate degree or certificate, it may be that students now enrolling in Community Colleges either do not need or are not attracted to the two-year programs which make up the largest portion of the Community College offerings. Information about the goals, aspirations, origins, and specific objectives of these students is needed as a basis for more effective planning for the future needs of similar enrollees.

Major impetus is now being given at the federal, state, and local levels to the expansion of career education at all educational levels and for all kinds of students. The assumption is widely held that young people without specialized training are largely unemployable, except in low paying jobs. While there is no evidence to date that Community College students without specialized training are unable to obtain employment without further education or training after leaving college, neither is there evidence that they are gainfully employed in positions commensurate with their level of general educational attainment. If it is found that there is high under- or unemployment among students who leave without specialized training, a likely implication for Community Colleges would be to exert more influence on all students enrolled to obtain occupational training of some kind, while continuing to prepare for transfer if that is their goal.

Reasons for attrition in the transfer group, i.e., the group which expects to transfer but does not enroll in a senior institution, are largely unknown. No estimate is available of the number of students who are eligible to transfer, based on their academic performance in Community Colleges. There are important implications from the study of this "transfer dropout" group for the development of external upper division programs by the senior segments, and for their residence programs under the new federal Basic Opportunity Grant program. The latter student aid program could make it possible for Community College graduates to enroll in upper division programs which may be currently beyond their financial reach.

Part-time adult students are a large component of Community College student bodies; however, their objectives, plans for achieving them, reasons for reentering postsecondary education, are largely unknown. A large percentage of this group of students may be seeking only a course or two for upgrading or breadth but until the intentions, aspirations, and achievements of this group can be examined, the success of Community Colleges in meeting its needs can only be assumed.

Proposed Outcomes of the Study

Planning

1. Quantitative data on student flow through Community Colleges for use in local, regional, and state-level planning for the expansion and establishment of new Community Colleges.

2. The establishment of a data base for Community College students, to include data needed for planning on both a continuing and recurring basis, with attention to variables required by the NCHEMS student flow model.

3. Identification of students whose educational needs are not now being met by Community Colleges and analysis of their problems and unmet needs for postsecondary education which the colleges are equipped to handle.

Counseling and Other Student Personnel Services

4. Identification of strengths and weaknesses in current career, educational and personal counseling programs in Community Colleges.

5. Possibilities for techniques to identify probable dropouts and programs, and special services to reduce attrition among those who should stay on in college.

Career Education

6. Possibilities for implementing career education concepts in the Community Colleges, in counseling and guidance, new types of degree and certificate programs, continuing education for employed dropouts and adults with significant work experience, and placement and follow-up services.

7. Data for curriculum evaluation and revision of current programs.

Transfer Programs

8. Data on transfer student flow and related problems.

9. Data on barriers to transfer which could be overcome, e.g., financial aid needs which are unmet.

10. Information on unmet needs of transfer program dropouts for career education, counseling, and job placement.

Grading and Retention Practices

11. Effects of non-punative grading and other reforms on student persistence and achievement.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

How Do We Go About Finding Out?

A basic sample of about 30,000 new students is proposed for study, drawn at random from among the students enrolling in one-third of the California Community Colleges for the first time in the fall term of 1972. The sample will be representative of all students registering in the colleges for the first time, without regard to their prior college attendance or enrollment status. The selection of the sample of colleges is to be made so as to insure geographical distribution, representation with respect to size and type of enrollments, ethnic and racial composition, socioeconomic status and sex of enrolled students, and number of years of operation.

The basic sample will be used to establish persistence, transfer, reentry, and graduation rates over time, with only minimum data collection planned beyond that which is normally available in student records. Comparisons of persisters, transfers, and dropouts will be made on the basis of both cognitive and noncognitive characteristics, to the extent that both types are available. Sub-samples of varying size will be drawn for intensive transcript analysis and follow-up of transfers and non-persisters by means of interviews and questionnaires. Students who transfer or reenter postsecondary education after a lapse in enrollment will also be contacted. Finally, administrators, faculty, and counselors in institutions represented in the study will also be interviewed during the drawing of conclusions and implications about the findings.

The currently projected time span of the study is from the fall 1972 term to the beginning of the fall 1975 term. This span encompasses seven registrations for regular terms in colleges on the semester system and ten for colleges on the quarter system. The target date for completing the study as proposed is January 1976. However, Community College personnel are well aware of the extended enrollment patterns of their students, which often go beyond the projected four-year tracking which is now planned. Further follow-up of the 1972 sample beyond 1975 is planned as part of the regular work program of the Coordinating Council staff.

Plan for Data Collection and Analysis

Sample	Data	Analysis
+ 30,000 new students in 32 Community Colleges who enrolled on the campus for the first time in the Fall 1972 term	Demographic data already available in college files, including -- prior educational experience -- age -- sex -- ethnic background -- marital status -- employment -- financial aid -- major field -- transfer intent -- socioeconomic status as indicated by census tract data -- others available in files	Comparison of persisters, withdrawals, stopouts, and transfers at various times, on the stated variables
30% sample of above (about 10,000 students total)	-- program attempted -- term transcript with units and grades -- end-of-term standing (probation, dismissal, etc.) -- notice of transcript sent -- notice of withdraw drop, reentry	-- units attempted vs. completed -- units passed vs. failed -- remedial courses attempted -- types of courses failed or dropped -- eligibility for graduation vs. transfer -- intent vs. actual transfer -- number of terms on probation -- incidence of academic dismissal
10% sample of dropouts from the 30% above, among those who do not transfer (sample at end of each term, for total of 1,000 Q's)	-- mail questionnaire on goals and objectives, major, employment, plans for further education, attitudes and advice	-- analysis of responses by major field, performance in college, personal characteristics
20% sample of the 10% sample of dropouts (about 200) so as to be representative of the total group	-- personal interview to explore in depth questions of personal objectives, satisfaction of them in college, needs for further education	-- content analysis of interviews to find ways in which Community Colleges may change programs, policies, and services

Sample	Data	Analysis
50% sample of transfer students to four-year institutions (1,000 estimated number of subjects)	-- mail questionnaire to ascertain problems in course and program articulation	-- analysis of responses by major field, transfer institution, personal characteristics
10% sample of transfer students responding to above questionnaire (estimated 100 subjects for interviews)	-- personal interview to explore in depth the problems encountered, satisfaction with transfer program, advice for changes	-- content analysis of responses to find possible areas for change in Community College and upper division programs and practices
Community College administrators, counselors, faculty (sample size unspecified at present)	-- personal interview to present findings and consider implications.	-- use of content in interpreting findings and make recommendations

Timetable for Data Collection

Fall 1972

1. Enlist cooperation of the participating colleges; designate campus liaison officer for the study; select advisory committee.
2. Draw up specifications for the basic sample of 30,000.
3. Ascertain availability and accessibility of basic data in the sample of colleges.
4. Draw basic (30,000) and sub (10,000) samples of new students for study; flag college records for follow-up.
5. Extract basic characteristics data and record for EDP.
6. Obtain copies of student programs for 10,000 sample.
7. Monitor withdrawals from college during the term.
8. Construct questionnaire for dropouts.

Winter 1973

9. Monitor dropouts at end of prior term; note transcripts sent.
10. Mail dropout questionnaire and verification of transfer action.
11. Obtain lists of students on probation and dismissed.
12. Obtain copies of grade reports for sub-sample; analyze programs attempted and completed.

13. Construct questionnaire for transfer students.

14. Analyze grading and retention policies and standards for participating colleges.

Spring 1973

15. Repeat steps 7, 9, 10, and 11 for colleges on the quarter system.

16. Develop and try out interview schedules for dropouts and transfer students.

17. Develop and test procedures for EDP analysis of data for persisters and dropouts in samples of 20,000 and 10,000, term by term and for the three-year follow-up period.

Summer 1973

18. Repeat steps 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

19. Refine instruments and procedures for use in 1973-74.

Fall 1973

20. Repeat steps 7, 9, and 10; possibly 6 and 12, also.

21. Interview 1972-73 dropout sample which did not transfer.

22. Analyze characteristics data for 30,000 sample of persisters vs. dropouts in 1972-73.

23. Analyze performance data for 10,000 sample of persisters vs. dropouts in 1972-73.

Winter 1974

24. Repeat steps 7, 9, 10, and 11.

25. Mail questionnaire to transfer subsample (students transfering after one year in Community College).

26. Plan and perform initial analysis of questionnaire responses from first-year dropouts.

Spring 1974

27. Repeat steps 7, 9, 10, and 11 for colleges on the quarter system.

28. Interview transfer sample who entered four-year institutions in the fall of 1973.

29. Interview dropouts who undertook some other type of postsecondary education or training (identified from questionnaire returns).

Summer 1974

30. Repeat steps 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

31. Identify graduates; compare personal and performance characteristics data for graduates and non-graduates among the persisters.

Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer 1974-75

32. Repeat essentially the steps performed in 1973-74, for the second-year dropouts, transfers, graduates, and persisters.

Fall 1975

33. Complete analysis of questionnaire and student questionnaire and interview data.

34. Interview Community College administrators, counselors, and faculty.

35. Identify and analyze characteristics and problems of students who persist in the Community Colleges, either in continuous attendance or after dropout and reentry.

36. Complete the report of the project.

Schedule of Outputs

Fall 1972	Statistical accounting of the origins of new students on the sample campuses in the fall term, including proportions enrolling direct from high school, from other Community Colleges, as "reverse transfers."
Winter 1973	Statistical description of new students in the fall term using basic demographic and academic characteristics data, e.g., sex, age, socioeconomic status, and educational plans.
Spring 1973	First report on non-persisters, to include percentages dropping out (1) during and at the end of the term, (2) with satisfactory and unsatisfactory grades, and (3) from various types of programs.
Summer 1973	Statistics on numbers of certificates awarded to students completing one-year programs; also on numbers of associate degrees granted after one year at the sample colleges, by origins of students.
Fall 1973	Statistics on numbers and institutions of 1972 new students who transfer during or at the end of the first year from the sample colleges.
Winter 1974	Second report on non-persisters, to include in addition to the breakdowns above, percentages (1) receiving certificates who do not continue, (2) transferring to other types of institutions, (3) withdrawing with failing grades (or dismissed for academic reasons).

Spring 1974	Statistical report on units attempted, completed, and earned in 1972-73, by various sub-groups of students including non-persisters.
Spring 1974	Statistical analysis of differences among institutions in persistence rates.
Summer 1974	Statistics on certificates and degrees awarded after the second year, persistence without degrees or certificates, reentries during the second year of the follow-up.
Fall 1974	Report on transcripts issued for transfer applicants; continuing persistence and reentering students.
Winter 1975	Statistics on verified transfer to other colleges and universities, enrollment in non-collegiate institutions.
Summer 1975	Statistics on degrees and certificates awarded after third year; dismissals and withdrawals without degrees, certificates, or indications of transfer.
Fall 1975	Final statistical report on persistence, reentry, transfer, and completions, by field, sex, institution or origin, and other demographic variables.

Descriptive-Analytical Reports

Spring 1973	Description of personal and educational characteristics of early non-persisters, including data from questionnaires and/or interviews with sample of students leaving the sample colleges after one term.
Spring 1973	Validation of the NorCal statistical technique for predicting early dropouts in colleges using the NorCal questionnaire.
Fall 1973	Comparisons of first-year persisters and various types of non-persisters in terms of educational and personal characteristics which are believed to be related to their decision to persist or withdraw.
Fall 1973	Description of institutional policies and practices in such areas as counseling, testing, academic advising, grading and retention, and remediation.
Fall 1973	Analysis of institutional differences in persistence rates in terms of policies, practices, and programs, in an attempt to identify those which appear to enhance persistence.
Winter 1974	Analysis of differences in persistence and completion rates of students in various types of occupational and liberal arts programs, in terms of both student and program variables without respect to the institutions in which they are enrolled.

Fall 1974	Description of academic progress of samples of persisters and non-persisters in terms of types of programs, grades, adherence to prescribed curricula, changes in program and/or plans.
Spring 1975	Description of responses from interview sample with respect to motivation, perceived achievement of goals, reasons for not transferring, evaluation of opportunity given them in Community College.
Fall 1975	Analysis of questionnaire and interview data from transfer students with respect to problems, plans, suggestions for improvement in articulation in both the two-year and four-year institutions.
Fall 1975	Final analysis of characteristics of persisters and non-persisters, including performance, and special attention to students in irregular attendance.
Fall 1975	Final description of the achievement of students persisting for various periods of time, with assessment of their achievement of goals.
Fall 1975	Report on interviews with administrators, faculty, and counselors in two- and four-year colleges with respect to the findings of the study.

Progress Reports to the Legislature

January 1974, progress report with attachments

January 1975, progress report with attachments

January 1976, final report

APPENDIX A

Some Assumptions About the Study

1. Not all attrition is "bad" in the sense that it should be eliminated. For some students, "stopping out" is a wise action at that particular time. For others, objectives are sometimes achieved outside degree and certificate programs, with no visible award by the college for such achievement.

2. The California Community Colleges are firmly committed to a continuation of the open-door policy for admissions. At the same time, they are continuing to search for better ways to assist students in making better educational and career decisions, both before embarking upon collegiate studies and while they are enrolled, as initial choices appear not to be in the best interests of the student.

3. The satisfactory performance of the limited number of students who transfer from Community Colleges to four-year institutions is not a complete measure of the effectiveness of the Community Colleges with respect to the transfer function.

4. Lifetime continuing education with repeated stopout and reentry points will probably characterize the Community Colleges in the late 1970's and beyond. Community College students appear now to be pursuing this type of enrollment pattern but programs are organized for the most part on the assumption that students attend full-time for two years after high school graduation, until attaining a degree and/or transferring.

5. Planning at the state, regional, and local levels presupposes a data base which does not now exist for the Community Colleges. The Higher Education Act amendments of 1972 will increase the necessity for such a data base in order to take advantage of the planning aspects of the amendments.

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